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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Egypt, Syria/US,
Syrian/Lebanon, Iraq, Palestinian Territories (4/25)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers today reported President Asad's phone call to President Mubarak to condemn the terrorist bombings that hit the Dahab resort in Sinai and to extend condolences on the victims.

Papers also featured a statement by Dr. Buthaina Shaaban, Minister of Expatriates, during a meeting with a delegation of the International Cooperation Council in the US, that the main problem in the region is the absence of a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and non-implementation of relevant international resolutions. Shaaban briefed the delegation on the situation in the region, saying that instability is a result of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the US occupation of Iraq. The Minister said that "the terms being used by western media connecting terrorism with Arabs and Muslims constitute a serious menace to the future of relations between the eastern and western worlds. Members of the visiting delegation reiterated the importance of working with Syrian clubs and organizations in the US to convey an accurate image of Syria and its culture.

The Syrian press reported that the Civil Committee on Syrians Missing in Lebanon called for consideration of the issue of lost Syrians in Lebanon as a primary item in any Syrian-Lebanese talks. The statement added that the "fraternal Lebanese people are innocent of the acts of the malicious parties who killed the Syrian workers," and called for punishing those responsible for the crimes and for getting back the 804 lost Syrians who are still alive.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"Terrorism strikes again in Sinai. Scores of fatalities and casualties in three explosions that hit the Dahab resort. President Asad denounces the criminal act and extends condolences to President Mubarak for the victims" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/25)

"The Civil Committee on Syrians Missing in Lebanon calls for

consideration of the issue of Syrians missing in Lebanon as primary item in any Syrian-Lebanese talks" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 4/25)

"Information Minister Bilal discusses enhancement of bilateral cooperation with French Ambassador in Damascus" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/25)

On directives of President Asad and with the presence of Vice-President Attar, the Popular Committee decides to start a public donation campaign on Sunday to support the Palestinian people.

"Norway, following Switzerland, challenges Washington and expresses readiness to meet with Hamas officials" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/25)

"Israel commences its disengagement plan in northern West Bank. Hanieh calls for confronting challenges. Norway rejects US pressure" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 4/25)

"In a Symposium on Water Security, the Arab League warns against the dangers of Israeli robbery of water in Golan and South Lebanon" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/25)

"Nasrallah, SecGen of Hizbollah: We reject border demarcation in Shebaa Farms under occupation" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/25)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Lebanon's Strength Is in its Pan-Arab Affiliation"

Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (4/25): "US Assistant Secretary of State David Welch stated that the United States wants Lebanon to be a strong country.... Washington wants Lebanon to be strong against its Arab brothers and their national hopes and ambitions, primarily against Syria, because it is the firm opposition force against the American-Israeli plans....

"The strong Lebanon that Washington wants is a Lebanon allied with Israel.... The US Administration wants to see Lebanon in this position for three reasons: to relieve Israel from Lebanon's resistance, to compensate for its failure to make Iraq a model for the Greater Middle East, and to turn Lebanon into a burden for Syria and Arabs and their pan-Arab efforts to ensure their security, existence, and identity....

"Lebanon will remain too strong to be isolated from its national role and pan-Arab affiliations.... The future of the country will be shaped by the Lebanese people and their nationalist forces, which realize that Lebanon's real power lies in its pan-Arab affiliation, national unity, and resistance against the plans of subjugation and Westernization...."

"Kind with Officials, Tough on Issues"

Buthaina Sha'ban, Minister of Expatriates, commented in government-owned Tishreen (4/25): "Some Arab officials [in what appears to be a reference to Lebanese Prime Minister Fu'ad al-Sani'ora and his meeting with President Bush] appear willing to offer concessions on national causes in return for a short meeting with President Bush or a public relations gesture from other Western leaders or media....

"The warmth and intimacy that President Bush or other Western leaders show toward visiting Arab officials are meant to influence these officials into relinquishing Arab rights.... What does it mean to us when President Bush says that 'Lebanon is a model for the Middle East'? Does it mean that other

countries in the Middle East will be Lebanonized in order to turn Israel into the sole, hegemonic power in the region, as Iraq was Lebanonized after its occupation? Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi men, women, and children were killed and the country was turned into warring sectarian parties, unable to create a real democratic political system expressing the unity of the people and their causes, free from ethnic and sectarian considerations and from the personal interests of opportunist politicians associated with this ambassador or that. Or does it mean that the official who delights the US president to the point that makes him pat this official's shoulder -- with the same hand that signed the decision to cut aid to the Palestinian people -- will become a model for anyone who wishes to win the approval of the president and, consequently, earn an invitation to visit Washington? He must pay the price of the visit in advance by pursuing the resistance and stripping it of the elements of survival. And in return for the visit, he must also sell out family and neighborly relations with a country that has all the bonds of common interests and joint destiny with his country...."

"Fight to Serve America's Interests"

As'ad Abbud, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (4/25): "The US administration endeavors to create new animosities in the region, such as conflicts between Iran and the Arabs, Sunnis and Shiites, and Muslims and Christians...."

"Such conflicts would be a strong card in the hands of Washington, enabling it to implement its plans without waging new wars that it might lose...."

"Creating hostile climates in the region in which Israel is excluded and terrorism is used might be a tactic to throw the region off balance and keep its countries busy with each other so that the United States will not need to wage new wars. This is one of the secrets of the deep hostility toward Iran and Syria, as both reject hostility between them and insist that Israel is the number one enemy in the region...."

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